



Office of the Harris County Attorney Vince Ryan

A report from your County Attorney

August, 2010



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About us:

The Harris County Attorney is the civil lawyer for Harris County, its elected officials, and many other governmental entities. We are authorized by law to:

- Use civil enforcement to protect neighborhoods, clean up the environment, and shut down illegal enterprises;
- Protect children and the elderly through our representation of state and county agencies;
- Defend Harris County when lawsuits are filed against it;
- Pursue claims and collect revenue when the County is owed money;
- Advise elected officials, department heads, and others.

Who we represent:

Our office is the first County Attorney's Office in the State of Texas to be created solely to serve a major urban county's civil law needs. We represent not only Harris County but other entities that operate within Harris County, including the Harris County Hospital District, the Harris County Flood Control District, the Harris County Toll Road Authority, the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, and the Greater 911 Emergency Network.

Our Organization:

Our 94 lawyers and 101 support staff are organized into nine divisions:

[Compliance Division](#)
[Employment Division](#)
[Environmental Division](#)
[General Counsel Division](#)
[Hospital District Division](#)
[Protective Division](#)
[Real Property Division](#)
[Special Prosecutions Unit](#)
[Trial Division](#)

OUR MISSION

WE, THE MEMBERS OF THE HARRIS COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, BOTH LAWYERS AND NON-LAWYERS, ADHERE TO THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL ETHICS AS WE SERVE THE PEOPLE OF HARRIS COUNTY AND STRIVE TO BE THE BEST PUBLIC LAW FIRM IN THE UNITED STATES.

Useful Links:

[Harris County](#)
[Appraisal District](#)
[Toll Road Authority](#)
[Voter Registration/Tax Office](#)
[Flood Control District](#)



Helpful Phone Numbers

Transportation Services
713-696-1992
Veterans Services
713-755-5243
Abuse Hot-line
1-800-252-5400
Guardianship Program
713-363-2300
Crime Stoppers
713-222-TIPS
Hospital District Eligibility
713-566-6509
Nuisance Abatement
713-566-6509

"Of Service to All, According to Law" is our unofficial office motto and we have been working to live up to it. We want you to know about some of our recent accomplishments that will make a difference in your lives.

Film: Dog Fighting: Cruelty in the Heart of Texas



We are working with law enforcement, prosecutors, community leaders, and animal protection organizations to combat dog fighting in Texas. Our office has produced an anti-dog fighting video entitled, *Dog Fighting: Cruelty in the Heart of Texas* to bring attention to the danger and cruelty of this blood

sport. The video promotes responsible pet ownership and non-violent alternatives to dog fighting. Vince has formed a Special Prosecutions Unit, headed by Assistant County Attorney Linda Geffin, to investigate incidents of animal cruelty and to take legal action to remove animals from inhumane conditions. *Caution there are disturbing images depicting dog fighting and cruelty to animals.* [Click here](#) to view the film. .

Fighting Polluting Companies



Our office requested that a receiver be appointed to take over the assets of international businessman Klaus Gennsler and several of his companies. Court documents filed by the County Attorney show that these companies have been storing thousands of gallons of hazardous and flammable waste in leaking containers along Vince Bayou in Pasadena, Texas. District Judge Kyle Carter granted the request. The receiver will use the assets of the companies to identify the wastes and dispose of them at an approved facility.

Protecting Children

The County Attorney's Protective Services Division provides legal representation to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Last year the Office of the County Attorney filed over 3,700 cases to protect abused and neglected children in Harris County.

Debbie Dillard, Community Outreach Director, and Estella Olguin Community, Relations Director for Childrens Protective Services, worked with SMG-Reliant Park, to obtain circus tickets to permit foster parents and foster children to attend the Ringling Bros. Circus. CPS currently has 5,000 children in custody in Harris County, 50% of them under the age of 10.

Helping Hospital District HMO Collect from State

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission has been ordered to pay \$249,999.00 to the Harris County Hospital District's HMO for medical expenses incurred in the treatment of a newborn child. The State Office of Administrative Hearings found the Commission to be in breach of its contract with the HMO. Assistant County Attorney Nancy Wingstrom represents the HMO, Community Health Choice, Inc., which is owned and operated by the Harris County Hospital District.



Cleaning up Salvage Yards

Hundreds of salvage yards operate through out Harris County, some, outside the law. One of the highest priorities of our office has been protecting neighborhoods from the blight and environmental hazards that occur when junk yards try to operate next to homes, churches and schools.



Laura Fiorentino Cahill, Deputy Division Chief of the Environmental Division, recently filed an action against a north Houston auto salvage yard operator because the business was too close to a residential neighborhood, was improperly storing wrecked vehicles, and had allowed soil to become contaminated with lead. Harris County Commissioners Court authorized the Office of the County Attorney to take action against other salvage yards that violate health and safety laws and ignore state law.

Collecting Phone Company Overcharges



Our office filed suit seeking to recover over \$2 million on behalf of the Harris County Hospital District from AT&T/Southwestern Bell Telephone Company. The suit claims that the phone company fraudulently collected "municipal charges" from the Hospital District in violation of state law and ordinances adopted by numerous cities in Harris County. The suit alleges that from 1991 through February

2000, Southwestern Bell improperly assessed and collected "municipal charges" from Harris County Hospital District and other local and state municipalities.

Warning: San Jacinto Waste Pits

Our office has been working with the EPA to warn the public about the dangers of eating fish in the area of the San Jacinto Waste Pits, a partially submerged superfund site in the San Jacinto River. During the late 1960s, pits next to the river were filled with dioxin-laden paper waste from a nearby paper mill. Over time, due to local subsidence, the San Jacinto River flowed into and through these pits spreading dioxin, one of the deadliest chemicals in the world. The EPA has ordered the responsible parties to immediately contain the remaining waste on-site and to work on a long-term solution. Snehal Patel, Environmental Regulatory Section Chief, has been working with the Public Infrastructure Department, Commissioner Sylvia Garcia's office, and Public Health and Environmental Services on this project.



Deputy Brad Geaslin from Constable Abercia's office and County Attorney First Assistant Terry O'Rourke tour the San Jacinto Waste Pits Superfund Site.